

Role, Size and Composition of CGIAR's Executive Council Moving Ahead

Summary

The CGIAR Members asked the CGIAR Secretariat to look at specific issues that are related to role, size, composition and operation of ExCo. This paper was prepared in response to the Group's request and concludes with seven proposed actions, below:

- 1. On a trial basis for two years, the CGIAR could delegate to ExCo decision-making responsibility on Center and Challenge Program external reviews and on review and approval of MTPs. Any issue requiring, in ExCo's judgment, full discussion by the CGIAR Membership would be brought to the CGIAR forum for further discussion and decision.*
- 2. ExCo's decision-making processes could be adjusted to avoid conflicts of interest. The CGIAR Secretariat could be asked to draft required adjustments to ExCo's Rules of Procedure.*
- 3. The responsibilities of ExCo members could be more clearly defined, such as accepting the burden of initiating and maintaining regular dialogue among the members of one's constituency. The CGIAR Secretariat could be asked to draft required adjustments to ExCo's Rules of Procedure.*
- 4. Members from the South may wish to form a caucus group. If they need assistance in this, the CGIAR Secretariat could help in facilitating the process and organizing pre-meeting sessions of the group before ExCo and CGIAR meetings. CGIAR Secretariat could regularly remind Members from the South that meeting-related travel costs can be covered, if needed.*
- 5. The size of the ExCo contingent from the Europe constituency could be increased by one (from 3 to 4).*
- 6. ExCo should maintain a "CSO space" for seeking perspectives from the CSO community. CSO participation at ExCo should be on an issue basis, following a systematic canvassing of CSO views, through invitations to specific individual(s).*
- 7. ExCo should monitor closely the impact of attendance at its meetings by observers on ExCo's own internal efficiency.*

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Background

At its 2006 Annual General Meeting (AGM06), the CGIAR held a preliminary discussion on the size and composition of its Executive Council (ExCo).¹ ExCo had been in existence for five years and maintained its original size and composition until the number of members was reduced to 20 (from 21) earlier in 2006 when the CGIAR agreed to have the Alliance of CGIAR Centers represented by one individual, instead of two. This change prompted some in the CGIAR to question if there was need for other changes in ExCo, paving the way to the preliminary discussion held at AGM06.

The discussion on this issue at AGM06² and subsequent feedback from participants showed that CGIAR Members:

- do not consider ExCo's size to be a major issue—so long as representation of diverse perspectives was well balanced with the needs for efficiency;
- do not favor creation of two classes of ExCo members;
- see an important need for elevating the voice from the South and eliminating barriers to their participation;
- stress that ExCo members represent their entire constituency group and not just themselves and, to that end, suggest that additional mechanisms for caucusing among Members be explored;
- would like ExCo to handle more of the CGIAR business on the Group's behalf, instead of bringing all matters to the CGIAR for discussion and decision—thus enabling the Group to spend more of its time on larger strategy and policy questions.

The Group asked the CGIAR Secretariat to look at the issues more closely and carry out a detailed analysis on the role, size and composition of ExCo, taking into consideration the views expressed by Members. This paper was prepared in response to the Group's request.

¹ ExCo's performance has been regularly assessed by both ExCo and the CGIAR as a whole, but ExCo size, composition and operations had not been revisited since its establishment.

² A preliminary concept note discussed at AGM06 raised three questions on ExCo:

1. Should ExCo continue as a stakeholder committee or should it be reverted to the originally-intended shareholder committee?
2. Should the allocation of seats to shareholders (currently at 13) remain the same? Should the distribution to different Member groups remain the same?
3. How effective are the Member constituency groups in terms of caucusing among themselves on issues before and after ExCo meetings? Is there need for additional mechanisms for dialogue with non-ExCo CGIAR Members?

ExCo and Decision-Making in the CGIAR

As defined in the CGIAR Charter, ExCo is “a committee of shareholders, expanded to include stakeholders, incorporating perspectives from all components of the CGIAR System.” Its main responsibilities include:

- acting on behalf of the Group between AGMs on matters delegated to it by the Group;
- facilitating the Group’s decision making by reviewing major policy issues and submitting recommendations for consideration by the CGIAR;
- providing oversight during implementation of the Group’s decisions.³

A quick review of the decisions taken by the CGIAR on items previously discussed by ExCo shows that the CGIAR rarely, if ever, disagrees with the recommendations of ExCo. Through its meetings to date, ExCo made 48 recommendations to the CGIAR, of which 45 (94 percent) were endorsed fully, and the remainder endorsed with slight modifications. This is partly because of the CGIAR’s confidence in ExCo’s work (as reflected by the data from surveys of the CGIAR) and in part because ExCo members make up a good portion of the CGIAR Membership. Additionally, decisions taken by ExCo on behalf of the CGIAR are generally well accepted by the Group, and have suffered minor changes, if any, in these years of ExCo operation. This, when coupled with the desire of the CGIAR Members to delegate more decision-making to ExCo, suggests that several regular CGIAR business items could be handled differently, by either (1) delegating more decision authority to ExCo, or (2) making more decisions on a virtual, no-objection basis. Candidate business items that could be handled this way (perhaps on a trial basis) include external reviews of Centers and Challenge Programs and review and approval of MTPs.

Delegation of more decision authority to ExCo would enable the CGIAR to spend more time on strategic issues. In some cases, a conflict of interest could emerge and need to be addressed.⁴

³ *The Charter of the CGIAR System, 2007.*

⁴ ***Resolving conflicts of interest.*** Some conflicts of interest would arise were ExCo to serve in a decision-making capacity on behalf of the CGIAR in some matters. This is because, unlike the Consultative Group where only Members (shareholders) who have paid the required minimum contribution for the previous two calendar years have the right to participate in CGIAR decision-making, in ExCo decisions are made not only by representatives of shareholders but also by representatives of stakeholders (e.g., Science Council Chair, Alliance representative, GFAR Chair, etc.), because all ExCo members are all full members. Having the stakeholder perspectives helps enrich discussions in ExCo and yield recommendations to the CGIAR that are broadly acceptable to both the shareholders and stakeholders. CGIAR has the option to agree or disagree with the view emerging from ExCo (which it has rarely done).

When CGIAR delegates some of its decision-making responsibility to ExCo, that delegation is and can only be to the subset of ExCo members who are also CGIAR Members (and who have been elected to ExCo by their fellow CGIAR Members)—not to the entire membership of ExCo. Having all stakeholders participate in ExCo’s decision-making would create clear conflicts of interest, e.g., representative of the Centers participating in decisions about Center matters, or Science Council Chair participating in decisions on advice received from the Science Council. To avoid such conflicts of interest, at decision-making time, ExCo Chair could invite only the CGIAR Members who are on ExCo to express their views.

Absence of Presence and of Voice from the South.

A key issue raised at both ExCo and AGMs, particularly AGM06, was the weakness of the voice from the South within ExCo and, many times, at AGMs as well. Examining the attendance record at ExCo meetings throws some light on this issue:

- Overall attendance rate at ExCo meetings is quite high (89.4 percent). On average only 2.2 members were absent from an ExCo meeting.
- A great majority of these absences were from members from developing countries (79 percent of all absences).

These absences naturally translate to weakness of voice from the South. Given that other members of ExCo were usually present in full force (including the stakeholder representatives), the deliberations and decisions of ExCo have not benefited sufficiently from perspectives from developing countries.

Whose voice is it? Technically each ExCo member (excluding the stakeholder representatives) represents the views of the constituency group it belongs to. However, this needs to be strengthened, as most members represent the views of only their own delegation. When there is opportunity for dialogue among the members of a constituency (such as the European group which meets regularly under the EIARD umbrella), collective views can be formed and reflected at ExCo meetings, but this is rare.

One possible solution is to define more clearly the responsibilities ExCo membership entails, including initiating and maintaining regular dialogue with the other members of the constituency so that their voice can be heard at all ExCo meetings. This could be a condition of acceptance of ExCo membership by an elected Member

Presence ? Voice. Although attendance is a necessary condition for having a voice at ExCo meetings, it is not sufficient. Voice requires attendance and participation. Although this varies among individuals, historically Members from the South have not participated as actively in discussions as other Members. Sometimes this is a cultural matter and can be addressed by using other means to tap the Member's views. Often, though, it is because the representative of the Member is new to ExCo and the CGIAR and is not familiar with the business at hand. It is also not unusual to have different individuals representing a Member country at successive ExCo meetings, leading to the same outcome.

The CGIAR Secretariat conducted a survey of Members from developing and industrialized countries in early 2007 to understand better the obstacles to participation and voice at ExCo meetings. Telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of 12 CGIAR Members with experience in ExCo (8 from the South and 4 from the North). These Members agreed that there is need to strengthen both the participation and voice of Members from developing countries in ExCo (and the CGIAR).

When questioned about their view of the obstacles to participation, the interviewed Members cited several barriers, including:

- the steepness of the minimum annual membership contribution (US\$ 500K);
- the “donor club” nature of the CGIAR;
- language;
- problems in obtaining visa for some venues;
- financing travel to meetings.

The last listed obstacle (financing) was cited most frequently by the interviewed Members, although CGIAR Secretariat has upon request financed Southern ExCo members’ attendance.

When asked about possible actions that could be taken to improve participation and strengthen the voice of the South, two clearly stood out:

1. Facilitate the formation of a caucus group made up of the developing country Members. This would strengthen South-South collaboration and enable them to have a stronger voice as a group in ExCo and the CGIAR. Two quick steps that can be taken in this regard:
 - organize a meeting of members from developing countries prior to every ExCo (and CGIAR meeting); and
 - arrange a pre-meeting dialogue of the group with the CGIAR Chair and Director prior to each ExCo (and CGIAR meeting).
2. Create a fund to finance travel costs, if and when needed, for developing country Members.

ExCo Size and Composition

Its size has been a significant contributor to ExCo’s performance as a committee. It is small enough to maintain frank dialogue among members (without need for microphones) and large enough to accommodate representation from key shareholders and stakeholders. A major change in size (in either direction) would compromise one or the other of these two objectives. As the CGIAR’s own size has not changed much, there is no compelling reason to make a major change in the size of ExCo.

With respect to composition, however, implications of two developments since 2001 need to be considered:

- change in funding patterns; and,
- change in the representation of civil society organization (CSO) perspectives in ExCo.

Implications of changes in funding. There has been a significant increase in overall CGIAR funding (from US\$337m to \$450m) during the 2001-2005 period. A major source for this increase is the \$66m increase in funding from Europe.

Since the establishment of ExCo, Europe has had three representatives, elected from among 17 Members. North America has had one representative, covering a constituency of two (USA and Canada). In the case of North America, rotation rules, proximity and frequent dialogue among the two countries have enabled both to be engaged with ExCo business closely. However, on the average, there is a 4-year “waiting time” for a typical European member of this constituency to serve as a member or alternate.

The composition of ExCo tries to balance several factors, including geography, South-North perspectives, type of organization (e.g., Co-sponsors, foundations), representation of views from key stakeholders, size of contribution, role within the CGIAR (e.g., World Bank), etc. Thus, size of financial support, although important, is not directly correlated with voice within ExCo. On the other hand, it is expected that the CGIAR would recognize major changes in financial support and reflect them adequately in voice in decision-making.

Representation of CSO perspectives. Since its founding, ExCo has sought perspectives from four partner groups:

- GFAR (through the GFAR Chair)
- Regional Fora (through rotation among regional fora)
- CSOs (no mechanism exists now—initially it was through the NGO Committee, later through a farmer representative, in a temporary mode)
- Private Sector (through the CGIAR Private Sector Committee)

Following the successful CSO-CGIAR Forum conducted during AGM06, the Members of the CGIAR recommended that an Advisory Group be formed to assist the CGIAR in engaging effectively with civil society. The challenge is, thus, to establish a group which does not claim to represent all civil society (and does not replicate the inherent failings which marred the now defunct NGO Committee), but assists the CGIAR Membership in identifying access to the diverse perspectives and civil society expertise.

The CSO-CGIAR Forum has enabled the CGIAR to form the nucleus of a network of CSOs, including the CSO participants at AGM, the Innovation Marketplace applicants and the participants in the Virtual Conversation that preceded the Forum—an active list of over 100 CSOs. This network could become the basis of an Advisory Group from which expert and issue specific advice could be sought. Thus an ad-hoc group could be formed to advise on specific issues or engage in specific tasks—and be disbanded after the activity is complete, or the issue explored. The CSO-CGIAR Forum Advisory Group that preceded the AGM worked extremely effectively in this manner.

The success of this approach would depend on the success in supporting and nurturing a CGIAR/CSO Network. A CSO focal point at the CGIAR Secretariat could work with Center-designated focal points to coordinate and backstop this initiative.

Having a functioning CGIAR/CSO network as described above opens the question of whether it is best to benefit from CSO perspectives through a “representative” who occupies a “CSO seat” at ExCo. Given the diversity of views which comprise civil

society, it is recognized that no one individual would be able to adequately *represent* civil society. Perhaps the most efficient way one could benefit from CSO perspectives is by *not* relying on one individual on all issues, but by identifying the *most appropriate* individual or group for a given issue. This is where the CGIAR/CSO network could serve as an invaluable resource.

Thus, an option to consider is to: (1) maintain a *CSO space* (not a “seat”) at ExCo; and (2) to build a mechanism to canvas and distill CSO perspectives on key issues being considered by ExCo; and (3) identify and invite appropriate individual(s) to attend the meeting of ExCo where these issues would be discussed. This would open the door for a more innovative and substantive form of dialogue⁵ with the CSO community.

The “Popularity” of ExCo Meetings

ExCo meetings have become increasingly popular over time, as reflected by the size of the number of invitees/observers (the average for the last five meetings is 19, about the same as the total number of ExCo members). During the last two meetings, close to one-half of the observers were from the Centers and the Alliance. This trend should not continue as there is a risk that, slowly, ExCo meetings could turn into the old Mid-Term Meetings of the CGIAR, eliminated as part of the reform program in 2001. Attendance should continue to be monitored and it could be worth checking with members if the desired frank dialogue atmosphere is being compromised by having a large number of observers.

Actions to Consider:

- 1. On a trial basis for two years, the CGIAR could delegate to ExCo decision-making responsibility on Center and Challenge Program external reviews and on review and approval of MTPs. Any issue requiring, in ExCo’s judgment, full discussion by the CGIAR Membership would be brought to the CGIAR forum for further discussion and decision.*
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⁵ For example, when ExCo is planning to discuss a specific issue or set of issues - such as alignment and it determines that there is need for a CSO perspective - the CSO focal point at the CGIAR Secretariat could define the issue, circulate a concept note, and seek recommendations from the CGIAR/CSO network of individuals or institutions who would have relevant expertise or knowledge. Nominees would be approached and invited to join a small expert conversation to determine CSO perspectives on the issue, and if appropriate, one or more of these individuals could be invited to attend the ExCo meeting to present the perspectives gathered from the expert group within the network.

4. *Members from the South may wish to form a caucus group. If they need assistance in this, the CGIAR Secretariat could help in facilitating the process and organizing pre-meeting sessions of the group before ExCo and CGIAR meetings. CGIAR Secretariat could regularly remind Members from the South that meeting-related travel costs can be covered, if needed.*
5. *The size of the ExCo contingent from the Europe constituency could be increased by one (from 3 to 4).*
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